

**Challenges to Pharmacy Education In Asian Region (Part 1)****Hassaan A. Rathore\* & Lee Shi Wei**

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**"Professionalism"** in pharmacy profession is endeavored and aimed at by almost all the pharmacy education institutions. Indeed it is one of the core objectives aimed in developing pharmacy curricula. However to this broad terminology there is no clear consensus on definition of professionalism found in literature [1] and thus becomes a big challenge for academicians involved in curriculum development. Ironically, professionalism is not the only challenge which pharmacy educationists have to cope with. There are several other fronts faced by pharmacy education in this era of rapid progress.

**Clinical orientation vs diversified orientation**

The transformation of pharmacy profession towards increased patient care orientation is definitely one of the new experiences being faced in developing countries. The question thus arises whether a pharmacy education institution should race for the new developments for which it is not fully prepared for or should it continue striving to provide better quality education to its pharmacists only according to the present needs of the country. Advocates of this opinion indicate lack of government policies, scarce funding and shortage of appropriately trained human resource [2]. Here one can debate that clinical orientation can be an addendum to the pharmacy curriculum of pharmacy institutions in countries richly equipped with pharmaceutical manufacturing units. This can cater for a basic level orientation of clinical pharmacy practice during the time when institutes are struggling with governmental policy development in favor of the desired changes as well as seek avenues to acquire funding to implement the desired new modules of patient care orientation in the syllabi. Certain quarters still advocate that the pharmacy education provided at bachelor level degree programs should encompass all components of pharmaceutical sciences and specialization in any of the desired components of pharmaceutical education should be an additional or post graduate level education [3,4].

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Malaysia. Tel: +604-6534784; Fax: +604-6570017email: [hassaan@usm.my](mailto:hassaan@usm.my)**Titles of pharmacy degrees and duration**

Over the past couple of decades several degree titles have been used by pharmacy education institutions. Traditionally Bachelors in Pharmacy or commonly known as B.Pharm is still a widely used pharmacy degree title in countries of South and South East Asia. However, we now see increasingly changing titles of these bachelor level degrees such as Pharm D, D.Pharm and M. Pharm. These differences in degree titles come with little difference in the course of education or curriculum in Asian pharmacy institutions. The duration of these bachelor in pharmacy level programs offered by pharmacy institutes in Asia range between 4-5 years of didactic and experiential learning programs leading to award of the respective degrees. This variation in degree titles and duration of education programs set up a challenge in cross country or cross institution acceptability and equivalency of basic pharmacy training. Some B.Pharm programs such as in Malaysian institutes are highly patient care oriented whereas countries in South Asia offering B.Pharm and Pharm D programs have syllabi designed to cater both traditional pharmacy education components along with extended clinical orientation [5]. In such complex situation the difficulty is faced not only by young pharmacists graduating with degrees of varying titles and duration but it also puts forth a challenge in harmonious recognition of these degrees by universities and professional bodies across borders. This ultimately leads to issues related to equivalency in basic training of pharmacists across continents. Federation of Asian Pharmacists Association (FAPA), Commonwealth Pharmaceutical Association (CPA) and several other forums have symposia, seminars and discussions on how to minimize the variation in pharmacy syllabi in member countries since long. Such efforts are being continued and academicians are looking forward to the upcoming 23<sup>rd</sup> FAPA Congress in Taipei and Asia Pacific Pharmacy Education Workshop in Penang this year [6].

**Degree credit transfers, franchised pharmacy degree programs and evening classes**

Over years degree credit transfers from one pharmacy institution to the other have increased. To some extent this facility to pharmacy students offers a great advantage of experiencing new cultures and learning in different environments. This concept has now been followed by franchised degree programs in pharmacy, especially in the private education sector. To certain corners this is merely a business concept but to others an opportunity to have relatively affordable choice



of a foreign degree program. In Malaysia, the public universities also franchise their pharmacy degree programs however this is done with the objective to develop local private institutions of pharmacy learning at par with the standards of more established systems at public universities. Such programs are usually supervised for at least the first four years of a pharmacy program initiated in a private college. The franchiser supervises, guides, develops and helps the franchisee to establish their pharmacy degree program over the entire period of franchise as well as awards the pharmacy degree to the students. This is done in close relation with the federal government's accreditation body which evaluates the development of human resource, infrastructure and other necessary components at the franchisee institution to ensure that a proper system is developed in the franchisee institution. This greatly controls and ensures quality education provided to the students in the franchisee institution. In Pakistan, public universities have decided to maximize the use of their present resources and have been offering bachelor level pharmacy degrees in two sessions a day. The morning session usually comprises of the regular admissions where students get subsidized tuition fees to study in these well established institutes of higher learning whereas the afternoon / evening session comprises of students who pay non-subsidized fees for studying at these institutions. Such an arrangement does bring many benefits such as more opportunity of students to study at these established pharmacy institutes in public universities as well as increased monetary benefits to the institute which itself never has enough funding from the government. Nevertheless the argument of a conflict of interest always stays as traditionally the purpose of public universities has always been affordable and quality education and not commercialization of professional education.

**Conflict of interest:**

Not disclosed

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**Authors' contribution:**

**Rathore HA\*** & **Lee SW**. have equally contributed in the rearrangements and modification and final editing of the text.